

## **CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)**

Proceedings of the 6<sup>TH</sup> Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (Brisbane, Australia, 19-27 March 1996)

### **RECOMMENDATION 6.2: ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

1. CONCERNED that much loss and degradation of wetland functions and values occurs without adequate prior assessment of the potential environmental impact of the relevant plans and projects, and that international standards and consistency of approach to the assessment of environmental effects can help reduce this;
2. RECALLING that successive recommendations and resolutions of the Conference of the Contracting Parties have encouraged the use of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) procedures as one means of fostering wise use of wetlands, and noting in particular the principles contained therein which are summarized in the Annex to this recommendation;
3. AWARE that many Contracting Parties already operate legal and administrative systems to give effect to environmental appraisal in various forms, but that many would benefit from new initiatives in this field and in particular the adoption of guidelines on standards, techniques and procedures; and
4. CONSIDERING that attention should be given to EIA objectives in wetland policies, and to wetland conservation objectives in EIA policies;

#### THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

5. CALLS ON the Contracting Parties to integrate environmental considerations in relation to wetlands into planning decisions in a clear and publicly transparent manner;
6. INVITES Contracting Parties, national and international organizations to submit to the Bureau available guidelines on environmental appraisal and EIA which may be relevant to wetlands, so that the Bureau may be able to maintain an overview and respond to enquiries on the subject; and
7. REQUESTS the Standing Committee and the Scientific and Technical Review Panel, in collaboration with the Bureau and partner organizations, to examine existing EIA guidelines relevant to wetlands and, if necessary, to arrange for the drafting of Ramsar guidelines, as an aid to the wise use of wetlands, in a form suitable for adoption by the 7<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties.

#### **Annex to Recommendation 6.2**

### **SUMMARY OF CONVENTION REFERENCES AND PREVIOUS CONFERENCE DECISIONS RELATING TO ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- (i) The obligation to promote conservation and wise use of wetlands, and to act when change is “likely”, entails anticipation, and requires a means of predicting effects (Article 3).
- (ii) Environmental impact assessment (EIA) is a recognized field which should be applied to this objective, by being formally enshrined in policy and law (Recommendation 3.3; Resolution 5.6)

- (iii) Equally, the body of thought evolved under the Convention, on e.g. what constitutes wise use, provides a frame of reference to aid judgements made in the course of EIA about environmental effects, where wetlands are concerned (Recommendation 4.10).
- (iv) Competent experts should be involved in the process (Recommendation 1.6).
- (v) EIA should be undertaken early enough to act meaningfully on its results, including refusing authorization for damaging activities (Recommendation 1.6; Resolution 5.6).
- (vi) The process should continue into project implementation stages, so that actual effects can be monitored and compared with predictions (Recommendation 3.3; Recommendation 4.10).
- (vii) EIA should not be restricted to individual projects, but should address the cumulative effects of several projects, and also strategic plans, programmes and policies (Resolution 5.6).
- (viii) EIA should not be restricted merely to the site of the proposed development, or the defined wetland, but should address external (e.g. upstream/downstream) influences, and should have regard to interactions between all components of water systems at the catchment level (Recommendation 4.10; Resolution 5.6).